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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NAHA 000253

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TAGS: JA MARR PREL

SUBJECT: HOW THE LDP MACHINE USED PRE-ELECTION DAY VOTING TO WIN THE OKINAWA GOVERNORSHIP

REF: NAHA 00243

CLASSIFIED BY: Kevin K. Maher, Consul General, American Consulate General Naha, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary. In the November 19 Okinawan Gubernatorial election, conservative Governor Hirokazu NAKAIMA beat his rival candidate reformist Keiko ITOKAZU by over 37,000 votes (347,303 votes to 309,985), in an election that the press was reporting as too close to call right up to election day. Exit polling on election day showed Itokazu in the lead by three to four percentage points. Nakaima's victory was due to the large number of ballots cast before election day (over 110,000, 16 percent of all votes) and the fact he won an estimated 70-plus percent of those pre-election day votes. The pre-election day voting system (PDVS) was established in 2003 as a way of increasing voter turnout by allowing people to vote up to ten days before the election. Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Okinawa and Komeito Okinawa officials tell us they took advantage of the system to secure votes for Nakaima by strongly encouraging supporters to vote early and report back to the party about who they voted for. LDP Okinawa officials plan to

use the system in future important Okinawa elections but do not believe the party could apply it successfully in other areas of Japan. They believe Okinawa's strong interpersonal ties, concentration of small and medium-sized businesses, and high voting rate make it uniquely situated to take advantage of the PDVS. End Summary.

PDVS Established to Increase Voter Turnout~

¶2. (SBU) In 2003, Japan established a nationwide system in which voters can vote up to ten days before the actual election day. Called the Pre-election Day Voting System (PDVS), it allows voters to use personal reasons such as golf outings, shopping, spending time with family, and personal vacation as reasons to vote prior to election day. The voting system was relaxed in order to reverse the declining voting rate by simply making it easier for people to vote.

~Benefits Strong Party Organizations ~

¶3. (C) LDP Okinawa Executive Director General Hiroshi NAKAMATSU tells us the new system played to the strengths of highly organized groups in general, and the LDP in particular. Because of the LDP's strong organizational skills, it was able to effectively use the pre-election day voting system. Okinawa had about 110,000 pre-election day votes, too many for a few people or a small organization to handle. Nakamatsu said at least 1,000 people were needed just to organize and move to the polls several thousand people a day.

~But Conservatives More than Reformists

¶4. (C) Komeito Okinawa Chairman Tomonori ITOSU noted that as far as organizational skills are concerned, reformist and

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conservative parties are about equal. Both camps garnered over 300,000 votes in the gubernatorial election. However, in getting pre-election day votes, the conservatives had an advantage. Nakamatsu and Itosu noted that reformist-supporting organizations were mainly labor and teachers' unions and government workers. Labor unions could not give their members time off from work and both union members and government workers would be required to take their own personal leave time to go vote prior to election day (which is on Sunday in Japan).

¶5. (C) On the other hand, many conservative supporters were businesses that could and did give their workers time off to go to the polls early. Nakamatsu also said that industry groups like Kanehide construction, Kokuba construction, and Ryukyu Oil (former Governor Keiichi INAMINE's company) encouraged their employees to vote for Nakaima. The companies gave employees several hours off with the tacit understanding that they would use this time to go vote for Nakaima. He added that the LDP political support groups (koenkai) also called supporters and friends, asking them to vote prior to the election. Itosu said since most of the people encouraging conservative supporters to vote were friends and family, the conservative side could easily confirm who they voted for. They would simply call them and ask, "You voted for Nakaima, right?" Nakamatsu said that LDP Okinawa even provided transportation to the polling areas. He remarked that this was very close to being an election campaign violation and thus the party only employed it in very important elections. He also added that the Okinawa Prefectural Police Department was watching the LDP closely because of this.

¶6. (C) Komeito's Itosu noted that in the past the reformists had been helped by bad weather, since their supporters turned out on election day even if it rained or was cold. However, conservative supporters tended not to show up if the weather was bad. In this regard the conservative camp really benefited from the fact that under the new PDVS conservative supporters had several days in which they could go vote. Sometime within the ten pre-election days time period, there had to be one good weather day.

¶7. (C) Conservative officials in Nago City, the future relocation site of Marine Corp Air Station (MCAS) Futenma, were particularly adept in using the pre-election voting system in the January 2006 Nago mayoral election, in which over 30 percent of the votes were cast before election day. Nakamatsu noted that the Nago LDP in the past had been active in getting people to use the absentee ballot system and then the PDVS when it was enacted in 2003. The LDP Okinawa used the lessons learned from the Nago elections in planning for last month's gubernatorial election.

#### Okinawan Environment Suited to Take Advantage of PDVS

¶8. (C) Our contacts think Okinawa is uniquely suited to take advantage of the pre-election day voting system. Nakamatsu thinks the reason the pre-election voting rate was high in Okinawa is because Okinawa has a lot of small and medium-sized businesses. Employees at these companies have a closer

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relationship to their bosses than those in large companies and could be more easily encouraged to vote for a particular candidate. He noted that even in Okinawa's largest city, Naha, most of the businesses are small-medium sized companies. Itosu noted that in big companies, like those in Tokyo, the influence of a boss on his workers is much less. So even if the company encouraged workers to vote and gave them time off, many would just say this is a personal decision and ignore the boss. Itosu also attributed Okinawa conservative success to the fact that personal connections are stronger here than in the rest of Japan and that Okinawans also are more interested in elections than other prefectures. Okinawa's voting rate has historically been higher than that of mainland Japan. Itosu said that Komeito members from other prefectures often are very surprised by Okinawans' interest level during elections.

¶9. (C) The impact of the PDVS in this election was significant. Although election officials do not publicly report the voting results broken out by election day and pre-election day, our press contacts and party officials tell us Nakaima received over 70 percent of the PDVS vote. On election day itself, exit polls indicated that reformist Itokazu led by three to four points. Clearly it was the early voting that offset Itokazu's election day lead. Only a well-financed and organized LDP and Komeito could have pulled this off. One well-informed newspaper editor here told us the rumor on the street is that each vote for Nakaima cost about Yen 5,000, which would mean the LDP and Komeito would have put about Yen 1.7 billion (Dols 15 million at 115 yen/\$1) into the campaign, a lot for a local election in Japan.

#### LDP To Use PDVS in Upcoming Okinawa Elections

¶10. (C) LDP Okinawa plans to make use of the pre-election day voting system in future important elections, such as Ginowan City mayoral and upper house Diet elections in 2007. The LDP sees the Ginowan City election as very important because it wants to have the city that currently hosts MCAS Futenma announce that it would be satisfied with relocating Futenma to Nago under the agreed realignment plan as an effective way to eliminate the "danger" posed by the air station. Nakamatsu told us the LDP Okinawa already has established a pre-election vote section to take advantage of pre-election day ballots in these upcoming races.

¶11. (SBU) We expect the PDVS to continue to be important in Okinawa. But given the unique circumstances of the elections here, it remains to be seen if the national LDP will try to use this system to its advantage in upcoming elections in mainland Japan.

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